

This text accompanied Scott McCracken's solo exhibition *Guesswork* at Thames-Side Gallery, January 2024 <https://www.thames-sidestudios.co.uk/news/exhibitions/2024/scott-mccracken-guesswork>

## A Grammar of Forms

by Rachel Jeffers

You've likely never heard of a sombrero hole but you'd know one if you saw it. The term refers to the standard type of hole punched into product packaging that allows merchandise to hang from display hooks. Its shape resembles the silhouette of a sombrero – the hat. The hat – its name meaning shade or shadow – is designed to act as a shield from the sun. I don't know whether "sombrero hole" describes just the hole in the packaging, or whether it also describes the remnant of card stock (the positive space) that has been removed. Neither does my search engine. Instead, it offers me an article about the Sombrero Galaxy.

Which brings me back to the sun. In Scott McCracken's paintings, suns are a frequent motif. Or maybe they're circles? Some of the circles act like bullseyes. Others appear to spin, like pinwheels, or rotate, like gears in a machine. To look at these paintings is to see the painter's consciousness at work. It is a grammar of forms, the emphasis placed, changed, and reiterated. Parentheses become crescent moons; an aside made solid. Exclamations become soundwaves become tides. A thought bubble contains a wordless quote, underlined until the lines themselves become the statement. Traces of earlier permutations of the painting are revealed, remnants of past decisions, like long dead stars whose light is still reaching us.

Toggling between construction and alchemy, McCracken uses elemental shapes as building blocks. He combines depth with flatness, light with shadow, lava with water. He establishes the ground, then reconsiders, and chooses the ether. He zeroes in on the smoking residue after the "POW!". It is the ghost of an experience, seeping from an envelope. Scattered, turned, and repeated until ashes are all that's left, a puddle after the flood. Your position is marked: YOU ARE HERE. But this is no map, only a collection of Xs. You have arrived at your starting point. You have reached your destination.